RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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IDEAS THAT WORK:
BEST PRACTICES IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Social housing providers in Canada face several important issues: the need to do more with less money (a universal concern across the country) providing housing and support services that allow residents to remain in their homes as they age, managing reserve funds effectively and meeting residents' changing needs.

As a consequence, a trend toward self-sufficiency has emerged in the social housing sector, with providers developing business plans and alternate sources of revenue in the face of government cutbacks. Social housing is an investment that benefits both residents and the larger community, so providers need access to innovative methods of protecting and enhancing these assets.

In *Ideas That Work*, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) documents a sample of best management practices in Canadian social housing to help providers address these pressures and promote improvement. Non-profit societies and housing co-operatives can adopt or adapt the examples to streamline administrative processes, use resources more efficiently and effectively, improve fiscal accountably, enhance self-sufficiency and encourage innovation.

Ideas That Work profiles selected "best management practices" under the categories of financial management; maintenance; governance and accountability; housing management and development planning. In addition, a synopsis of 27 "good management practices" is presented, along with a section on future trends—creative initiatives not yet fully implemented or evaluated—and an overview of two initiatives under way in B.C and Ontario designed to support a best practices approach to evaluating performance.

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES?

Ideas That Work defines best practices as strategies, practices and management tools that have produced superior performance and that organizations can adapt and implement for themselves. Best practices enable an organization to reach goals more efficiently and with greater success.

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FINDINGS

For *Ideas That Work*, CHRA selected best and good management practices in six key areas : financial management; maintenance; governance and accountability; housing management; development planning and human resources management. Presented below is a profile of each best management practice highlighted in the report and a reference to those organizations evidencing good management practices.

Financial management

Financial management includes practices that improve financial control, such as budgeting, long-term financial planning and investment strategies that minimize risk.

Best practice

B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) and Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C. (CHF BC), British Columbia

Pooled investment funds
BCNPHA and CHF BC have developed several pooled investment funds to maximize returns on short- and long-term investments for co-op and non-profit operating funds and to match investment terms to future replacement reserve requirements.

Good practices

Metis Urban Housing Corporation of Alberta Inc., Edmonton, Alta.

COHO (CHF BC), Vancouver, B.C.

Affordable Housing Society, New Westminster, B.C.

Cole Road Housing Co-operative, Guelph, Ont.

Peel Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Peel Living), Brampton, Ont. Clarion Co-op Association, Cambridge, Ont.

Housing Alternatives Inc., Saint John, N.B.

City of Ottawa Non-Profit Housing Corporation (City Living), Ottawa, Ont.

Maintenance

Maintenance includes measures to stay aware of the condition of housing stock, innovative planning for replacement work and promoting efficient repair services.

Best practice

Peel Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Peel Living), Brampton, Ont.

Asset protection program
Peel Living's Asset Protection Program projects capital requirements for each building in the organization's portfolio over 20 years and matches reserve funds with capital expenditures. Information on each building is entered into a database to track ongoing capital work, prioritize future capital needs and project cash flow requirements.

Good practices

COHO (CHF BC), Vancouver, B.C.

Affordable Housing Society, New Westminster, B.C.

Capital Region Housing Corporation, Victoria, B.C.

Pacifica Housing Advisory Association, Victoria, B.C.

New Brunswick Non-Profit Housing Association, Moncton, N.B.

Governance and accountability

Governance and accountability include measures that enhance relations between boards, staff and residents, effective strategies for communicating with residents and policies and procedures to eliminate discrimination. CHRA identified two best management practices in this category.

Best practice 1

Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC), Ottawa, Ont.

Governance model for board of directors
Centretown Citizens' Ottawa Corporation is a community-based non-profit housing organization that has developed a tenant- and member-driven structure for its Board and committee system.

Best practice 2

Metro Non-Profit Housing Association (MNPHA), Dartmouth, N.S.

Tenant Involvement
Metro Non-Profit Housing Association considers itself a partnership between tenants, staff, the Board and people who use the organization's support services. MNPHA adopted a social justice model founded on equity, self-help, respect and inclusiveness rather than a charitable model, and included the principle of tenant involvement in its original mission statement.

Good practices

Ramsey Heights Housing Co-operative, Calgary, Alta.

Sarcee Meadows Housing Co-operative, Calgary, Alta.

Coast Foundation, Vancouver, B.C.

Housing Alternatives Inc., Saint John, N.B.

City of Ottawa Non-Profit Housing Corporation (City Living), Ottawa, Ont.

Nepean Housing Corporation (NHC), Nepean, Ont.

Coopérative Nouvelle Ère de Longueuil, Longueuil, Que.

Housing management

Housing management includes promoting resident participation in management and developing efficient, non-discriminatory processes for selecting residents. CHRA identified two best management practices in this category.

Best practice 1

Saskatoon housing Authority (SHA), Saskatoon, Sask.

Youth leadership program – day care program
Saskatoon Housing Authority developed a youth program to provide alternative activities for youth and to address problems with youth vandalism and other issues. As well, day care in the surrounding neighbourhood was not affordable for residents, so the organization developed onsite day care.

Best practice 2

Coopérative d'habitation des Cantons de l'Est, Sherbrooke, Que.

Member participation in housing management and maintenance
Coopérative d'habitation des Cantons de l'Est is a non-profit housing co-op that has used grassroots property management techniques to involve members in housing management and maintenance since the co-op was first formed.

Good practices

Nepean Housing Corporation (NHC), Nepean, Ont.

City of Saint John Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Saint John, N.B.

Centre résidentiel et communautaire Jacques Cartier, Québec, Que.

Development planning

Development planning includes clear policies and strategies for ensuring housing meets long-term priorities, incorporating energy efficiencies and developing security features.

Best practice

Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC), Ottawa, Ont.

> **Development System**
> CCOC created a system for developing affordable housing after the elimination of government funding for new social housing in Ontario.

Good practices

Nepean Housing Corporation (NHC), Nepean, Ont.

Corporation d'hébergement de Mont-Joli, Mont-Joli, Que.

City of Saint John Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Saint John, N.B.

Human resources management

Human resources management includes policies and procedures to involve staff in planning and programs to develop property management skills among staff. No best management practice was selected in this category.

Good practices

Affordable Housing Society, New Westminster, B.C.

Katherine Sanford Housing Society, Vancouver, B.C.

Society of Hope, Kelowna, B.C.

FUTURE TRENDS AND SELF-EVALUATION

Ideas That Work also features three innovative initiatives that were recently developed, but not yet evaluated: family self-sufficiency programs in Edmonton (Capital Region Housing Corporation) and Victoria (Pacifica Housing Advisory Association); a community-based budgeting program in Toronto (Toronto Community Housing Corporation); and, the Social and Affordable Housing Certificate Program offered by Kwantlen University College in Surrey, B.C (BC Non-Profit Housing Association).

Additionally, *Ideas That Work* directs readers to two existing projects about best practices for affordable housing. In B.C., the provincial non-profit housing association has developed best practice materials and a website. In Ontario, a new provincial organization is developing performance indicators and best practices for social housing providers. *Ideas That Work* suggests that non-profit housing societies and housing co-ops across the country may want to use these materials as a model for evaluating performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Housing providers interviewed for the case studies in *Ideas That Work* identified several current pressures:

- In many parts of Canada, lack of housing supply programs has forced providers to develop multi-level funding partnerships to produce new housing.
- There is general agreement across the country that government funding agencies expect housing providers to do more with less money.
- A substantial percentage of existing social housing stock across the country is more than 25 years old.
- The social housing population is aging along with the rest of the country—a trend with several implications for housing providers.
- The Ontario government has devolved responsibility for managing social housing to municipalities.

To date, there has been little focus in Canada on evaluating new initiatives, and little discussion about setting good or best practices as benchmarks for assessing performance in the social housing sector. The best practices set out in *Ideas That Work* should help organizations evaluate their practices with others working in similar situations toward similar goals. The inference is that the adoption of appropriate best practices by providers of non-profit and co-operative housing in Canada will position them to address the pressures faced within the social housing sector.

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

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